

F. "Bull" Halsey. Barry's leadership combines the steadfastness of Halsey and the eagle-eye vision of a Nimitz. At the Third Fleet, he showed himself a Navy officer's officer.

At 56, Barry still has ample contributions to make to our country, whether in industry or further public service. He has already served as an inspiration to the Navy and Vermont, and I have no doubt that he will continue make enormous strides on behalf of others in whatever endeavors he pursues.

I know I will run across Barry very soon, but I want to congratulate him, his loving wife LuAnne, and their two sons Brendan and Aiden. The Senate, Vermont, and the country join me in expressing our deep gratitude. Thank you.

RURAL BROADBAND

Mr. ROBERTS. Madam President, I rise today to speak about rural America, and the need to ensure that this cornerstone of our way of life has the same access and availability to modern technology that many Americans take for granted. Specifically, I am referring to the availability of high-speed Internet, also known as broadband.

Broadband Internet is essential to rural development. It does for rural areas today what interstate highways did in the 20th century, and railroads did in the 19th century. It is key to attracting new businesses to rural areas, and helping our existing rural businesses grow and become more competitive.

Unfortunately, rural America continues to lag behind its urban and suburban counterparts when it comes to the availability of this essential resource. It is not that rural folks do not want broadband, but only that they do not have as much access.

In the 2002 farm bill, Congress created a loan and loan guarantee program to help build broadband out to rural areas that lacked this crucial service.

The Rural Utilities Service, RUS, an agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, was charged with the responsibility of administering the broadband loan program and using it to promote access in unserved, rural areas.

Unfortunately, the agency's implementation and administration of this program strayed from the rural focus Congress intended.

Instead of targeting our rural areas, huge sums of money have been used to provide broadband in urban areas, suburban developments, and towns that already have service.

Instances of waste and abuse have been clearly illustrated by the USDA inspector general, in hearings held by both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, and in prominent news reports.

There is wide, bipartisan agreement on what is wrong with this program. I believe that there should also be wide,

bipartisan agreement on how to move forward.

While a number of legislative and regulatory fixes have been suggested here in Congress and by the RUS, none so far have been comprehensive enough to surmount the challenges of deploying broadband in rural America.

I have been proud to reach out to my friend and colleague, Senator SALAZAR of Colorado, on the Senate Agriculture Committee to work toward a solution. It is the Committee on Agriculture that has jurisdiction over this program, and it is from this committee that a way forward must be found.

Together, myself and the distinguished junior Senator from Colorado, have worked toward a consensus driven, comprehensive approach to promoting broadband in rural America. On Monday of this week, we introduced legislation to accomplish this goal, the Rural Broadband Improvement Act of 2007.

This legislation will provide the secretary with additional guidance to direct broadband loans to those truly in need by clarifying where, when, and to whom loans can be made. It ties approval of loans to a requirement of nonduplication of service, making this legislation significantly more robust and less ambiguous than the current statute.

The issue of duplication of service, more than any other issue, has been the subject of criticism of the RUS. When RUS makes loans in areas that already have broadband service, it has a twofold negative affect.

First, it undermines the market. Often, rural towns may enjoy broadband availability. Small, independent providers that are already present in rural towns have their subscribers pulled out from under them by a competitor who, because they have an RUS loan, have an unfair advantage with which to offer lower rates. This can threaten the very existence of some locally owned, independent broadband providers that invested in rural towns without an RUS loan.

Second, when loans are going to areas that already have service, it means that truly unserved, rural areas for which this program was created continue to be neglected. Indeed, it is the outlying, sparsely populated areas that are in need of broadband service. These are the areas broadband loans should be made to serve—not overbuilding towns where the service is already present.

This is unacceptable. That is why this legislation which I am introducing on behalf of myself and my colleague from Colorado will attach to the definition of eligible rural community, a clearly defined requirement of non-duplication of broadband service.

Reforming and improving the broadband loan program means doing more than just addressing this one aspect for which it has been criticized. It also means eliminating unnecessary and unprecedented limitations on what borrowers are eligible to participate.

In particular, I am referring to the conspicuous 2 percent telephone subscriber line limit. This limitation acts as a disincentive for growth; unnecessarily penalizes larger, but still rural-focused phone companies; and ignores the reality that more and more households are abandoning land line subscriptions in favor of wireless communication. The bottom line is that limiting what providers can participate in the program does nothing to expedite broadband deployment in rural areas.

This legislation also streamlines the application and post-application requirements. For many small and independent providers with limited staff, it can be discouraging to look at a 38-page application guide to a 57-page application. What's more, those who go through this arduous process may wait for a seemingly indefinite period of time for a yes or no to whether their application is approved.

To address these matters, the act directs the Secretary to complete application processing within 180 days and allows parent companies and their wholly owned subsidiaries to file a single, consolidated application and post application audit report.

The bill further streamlines the application process by eliminating various other duplicative and burdensome application requirements, and directs the agency to hire whatever additional administrative, legal, and field staff are necessary to meet these requirements.

The act also contains powerful incentives to increase the feasibility of loans. First, it allows limited access to towns where broadband may be available, but in circumstances when doing so is necessary to building broadband out to the sparsely populated and outlying areas that have no service at all. I do want to stress, however, that this is not a loop-hole that will lead back to the problems of duplication and overbuild. The majority of households to be served by the project financed with an RUS loan must be without access to broadband. Additionally, the act creates better transparency and requires incumbent providers to be properly notified when an RUS applicant plans on doing so.

Second, the act ensures that collateral requirements are commensurate to the risk of the loan.

Third, instead of requiring an inflexible 20 percent equity requirement, the act provides more flexibility for small and start up companies by requiring only 10 percent equity, and allowing the agency to waive this requirement so long as the applicant can prove that it will be able to pay back the principal of the loan plus interest.

This legislation also codifies an innovative grant program based on the successes illustrated in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Broadband deployment in rural areas will work better once we know where it already is. To do this, grants will be made available to help fund partnerships between state

governments and the private sector to map where broadband is available in rural areas, and conduct outreach to areas where it is still unavailable.

I and my colleague, Senator SALAZAR, have always shared a concern for our rural citizens. I am proud to work with my neighbor to the west on this issue, and I look forward to working with my other colleagues on the Senate Agriculture Committee as we begin work on the 2007 farm bill.

OLDER AMERICANS MONTH

Mr. KOHL. Madam President, generation by generation, the face of America is always changing. In the next quarter of a century, the laugh lines of that face will deepen as the number of older Americans explodes. Today, those over 65 account for 12 percent of our population; in 2030, they will account for 20 percent. Academic experts, policy wonks, economists, and health care providers are conjecturing broadly about how this demographic wave will affect our society. As chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, I am listening carefully.

It is the charge of the Aging Committee to plan accordingly for the challenges facing our seniors tomorrow and to tackle the problems confronting them today. Older American Month, which occurs each May, gives us an opportunity to highlight these issues but let me assure you that it is impossible to relegate senior issues into one neat category, and soon it will be impossible to confine our attention to them to just 1 month.

Nearly every issue dealt with by Congress affects older Americans, or is affected by them, in a unique way. From emergency preparedness to broadcast technology, from the size of the labor force to regulation of corporate marketing practices, these issues are worthy of our attention from the older person's perspective. Then there are, of course, the more obvious challenges ahead of us, such as preserving Social Security, strengthening Medicare, and improving long-term care.

In the last 5 months alone, the Aging Committee has held hearings on a myriad of matters that are of vital concern to seniors. We have examined health care coverage for America's poorest seniors under Medicare Part D's low-income subsidy. We heard from the Vice Chairman of the Federal Reserve about the impact that millions of retiring baby boomers will have on our Nation's economy, and we learned about how best to retain and cater to the needs of older workers.

We have deliberated on the progress made by the nursing home industry over the last 20 years, as well as what currently needs to be done about the most neglectful, decrepit homes. Our investigative unit has shone a bright light on the shameful, deceptive sales tactics employed by certain providers of private Medicare Advantage plans.

We have put forth compelling evidence for the continuation of

SeniorCare, Wisconsin's highly efficient drug coverage program, in spite of the administration's desire to terminate it. And, I couldn't be more pleased to say, we worked with the rest of the Wisconsin delegation and in collaboration with Governor Jim Doyle to find a legislative fix to save SeniorCare, extending the program through December 31, 2009.

As demonstrated by the work I have described, it is easy to see that protecting seniors—whether from fraud, poverty, or mistreatment—is a priority for the Aging Committee. However, it is also our priority to enable them. Though older Americans are often considered to be a vulnerable segment of the population, in many ways senior citizens strengthen our society. America's seniors have had decades to master skills and garner accomplishments, often rendering them our best leaders and innovators. A lot of them are out in the forefront of professional fields, staying active within community and family life in various capacities, and leading by example.

The aging of America will affect every part of our society, and it will touch every family in decades to come. We reap the benefits of the continued contributions of older Americans, and in return they deserve the best quality of life our Nation can afford them.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

HONORING MARK STEPHENS

• Mr. AKAKA. Madam President, as chairman of the Federal Workforce Subcommittee, I would like to recognize a milestone in the career of a dedicated and committed public servant. Mark Stephens, an attorney with the Postal Regulatory Commission's Office of General Counsel, is retiring after a 33-year career. He joined the former Postal Rate Commission in 1974, and participated in the analysis and review of numerous postal rate, classification, and complaint cases.

Mark proudly notes that he started his Federal service career as a letter carrier for the old Post Office Department where he worked for three months during the summer of 1968. During his long tenure with the Commission, Mark also served in the Office of Consumer Advocate.

Mark's colleagues point to his professionalism, analytical and writing ability, and character as the embodiment of the finest qualities of public service. His insights and thoughtful counsel made a substantial contribution to the Commission's successful fulfillment of its statutory responsibilities. Mark has been a valued colleague to those at the Commission and his retirement will leave a void that will be difficult to fill.

Upon leaving the Postal Regulatory Commission, Mark intends to spend more time with his family, but will likely continue to monitor the progress

of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006 which significantly enhanced the authority of the PRC. Mark Stephens is a public servant who made a difference, and I wish him much future success.●

CONGRATULATING DETECTIVE STEVEN SILFIES

• Mr. BUNNING. Madam President, today I congratulate Detective Steven Silfies of Hopkinsville, KY. Detective Silfies was recently recognized as the "2006 Trooper of the Year" by the Kentucky State Police.

Detective Silfies is a 4-year veteran of the Kentucky State Police Force. He is assigned to Kentucky State Police Post 2 located in Madisonville, KY. Prior to joining the Kentucky State Police, Detective Silfies served more than two decades in the U.S. Army. This includes tours in both Afghanistan and Iraq. He also currently serves as de-facto liaison officer with personnel at Fort Campbell.

Detective Silfies truly exemplifies what it means to serve and protect the citizens of Kentucky. During the past year, Detective Silfies has played an integral role in the investigation of six murders. His devotion has led to two arrests in those investigations. Silfies also has played a prominent role in the solving of several cold cases. These include an arrest in a 27-year-old case of an out-of-State resident. Detective Silfies took a leading role in another cold case involving an out-of-State resident. This was a 13-year-old case in which Silfies uncovered overlooked evidence.

I congratulate Detective Silfies on this achievement. To be singled out among such a dedicated police force is truly an honor. He is an inspiration to the citizens of Kentucky and to dedicated police everywhere. I look forward to seeing all that he will accomplish in the future.

WOMEN'S TENNIS 2007 CHAMPIONS

• Mr. CHAMBLISS. Madam President, today I congratulate the Georgia Tech women's tennis team for winning the 2007 Women's NCAA Tennis Championship in Athens, GA.

The Georgia Tech women's tennis program celebrated its first NCAA title on May 22, 2007, with a 4-2 win over UCLA. The Yellow Jackets' win over UCLA marked its 21st straight match win, and they finished the season at 29-4.

I congratulate team members Amanda Craddock, Kristen Fowler, Whitney McCray, Amanda McDowell, Kirsti Miller, Tarryn Rudman, Alison Silverio, and Christy Striplin for their hard work and achievement. Additionally, I congratulate Alison Silverio on being named the tournament's Most Valuable Player. I further extend my thanks to the players' families and fans for continually supporting these outstanding young women throughout a long but